

The Howard Collector

AUTUMN 1972

17



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Editorial Notes

I will be the first to admit that running a serial in a publication that appears every six months is not a good idea, but there was no way I could publish "Spanish Gold on Devil Horse" in less than two installments. This story was written during the period when Howard was experimenting with various types of fiction - probably 1928, in this case. The locale of the story is Cross Plains and environs: Lost Plains (Cross Plains), Caloran (Callahan) County, Beard (Baird), and the Cadoak (Caddo) Peaks. Dr. Howard wrote, June 21, 1944, concerning his son: "Two peaks two miles apart to the northwest of Cross Plains were ever thrilling interest to him. He often gazed at them from our home and talked about them to me."

Donald M. Grant (West Kingston, R.I. 02892) has now released MARCHERS OF VALHALLA (\$4.50); two previously unpublished fantasy novelettes. I am currently (late November) proofing THE SOWERS OF THE THUNDER, so it will appear very shortly. It will be the most deluxe book by Howard to ever likely appear. Lancer has reissued KING KULL. Now out of print are THE PRIDE OF BEAR CREEK, RED SHADOWS, and RED BLADES OF BLACK CATHAY. The CSA Press (Lakemont, Georgia 30552) is publishing a volume containing two of Howard's westerns: the short

novel "Vultures of Whapeton" and the previously unpublished novelette "The Judgment of the Desert." Titles will likely be changed in the book; no details are available as to price, etc., but the book will be illustrated by Steve Fabian and is slated for April publication.

The sixth issue of *Is* (Tom Collins, 4305 Balcones Dr., Austin, Texas 78731; \$1.50) contains several letters from Howard to August Derleth. The Special Clark Ashton Smith issue of *Nyctalops* (Harry O. Morris, Jr., 500 Wellesley, S.E., Albuquerque, N.M. 87106; \$1.25) contains a letter from Howard to Smith. The first issue of *Etchings and Odysseys* (Eric Carlson, P.O. Box 7042, Duluth, Minn. 55807; \$2) will contain a previously unpublished short story, "Cas-onetto's Last Song," by Howard, plus two or three poems (previously published).

Some of Howard's non-series stories have recently been adapted for publication by Marvel Comics: "Dig Me No Grave" was in *Journey Into Mystery* #1 and "The Horror from the Mound" in *Chamber of Chills* #2. Some Howard elements are also used in the last few issues of *Marvel Premiere* (Dr. Strange). In May, *Conan the Barbarian* was selected Best Continuing Feature by the Academy of Comic Book Arts.

Subscribers are urged to keep me advised of any changes of address. Copies returned due to an incorrect address will not be re-forwarded without payment of 35¢ to defray added costs.

Victor Lim did the titles in the last issue as well as in this one. They improve the magazine's appearance greatly.

Spanish Gold On Devil Horse

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

I.

The Man With the Serpent Eyes

Mike Costigan gazed curiously at the object which lay in his hand.

"You say you found this on the East Peak? Just where?"

"Somewhere," answered the urchin to whom Mike's inquiry was addressed - a thin, trampish looking boy with a tousled mop of hair through which his small, varmint-like eyes gleamed.

"Somewhere," he repeated vaguely, his brow corrugated in effort. "Loose cliff - "

"You mean that cliff on the north side which was jarred loose by some blasting?"

"Yeah," the eyes lit momentarily, "that's the place. Lemme have it, will you?"

Mike replaced the coin in the grimy hand extended, saying as he did so: "Looks like a Spanish coin of the late 1700's. Don't let anybody get it away from you for nothing."

He watched the boy slouch away up the street - a waif known as Skinny, who had drifted in on the skirts of the oil boom and who was accounted mentally deficient.

"Strange he should find a Spanish coin on East Peak,"

Mike mused. "I've never seen one like it except in museums or private collections. I suppose some surveyor or pipeline worker lost it and the kid chanced to find it in his usual aimless wanderings over the country."

An instant later a friend hailed him and he forgot all about the boy and his find.

"Hey, Mike! Know anybody going to Beard? I'd sure like to catch a way."

"I'm not doing anything," Mike answered. "I'll drive you over there."

"Hate to put you to all that trouble - if you weren't going anyway."

"No trouble at all. It's such a fine morning that I'll be glad of the ride."

A few moments later the two were rattling along the road that led out of Lost Plains to the west. Mike's friend glanced at him curiously.

"How come you to decide to spend your vacation in your old home town when you coulda gone anywhere in the world, Mike? You got plenty of money."

Mike smiled. He was a tall young man, leanly but powerfully built with massive shoulders and long muscular arms. He had an open, whimsical Irish face, set off by expressive grey eyes and very black hair. His age was somewhere in the late twenties, though he appeared younger.

"Really, I scarcely know. I have a lot of good friends here though, and then - you know my first book and practically all my later stories were laid in this country, based on material I got out of the oil fields."

"Yes, but the boom's gone on and Lost Plains is drowzier than it was before they struck oil here. You're mighty

young to be a writer."

"This is the age of youth," grinned Mike. "I'm not many years away from thirty."

"How do you get any inspiration from this country?"

"I haven't, since coming back here," Mike admitted, "but the dregs of a boom always linger - backwash, driftwood stranded in the eddy - and I'm hoping to find a type to use as a character in a story or article."

"Stop on East Peak, then, and take a squint at the two geologists workin' there."

"Geologists? On East Peak?"

"That's what they say they are. But what oil chasers would be doin' there is more'n I can see. The Gulf people drilled all around there and didn't get enough oil to run the engine. These fellows don't look like regular surveyors either, somehow. Maybe they were sent up by some South American company. I don't know. They look like Spaniards - dark fellows with black mustaches - don't have much to say. They come here in an airplane, I hear. They say it's in that field north of the peak. The one that ain't bein' cultivated this year."

"Not many people live around the peak," said Mike. "No one within a couple of miles. They could camp there and do about as they pleased without interruption. I wonder where and how they get their provisions, do you know?"

"You can search me."

The peak in discussion loomed just beyond them, about ten miles from the town of Lost Plains, to the northwest. It was really a lone hill of considerable dimensions, rising abruptly from the level of the surrounding country and appearing to be of great height, though this appearance was

mainly an illusion created by the flatness of the surrounding country. A few miles further to the northwest rose its twin. These peaks were known collectively as the Cadoak Peaks and were differentiated by the terms East Peak and West Peak.

They represented a formation common to Central West Texas. These hills, like most others of the type, had been formed ages ago by erosion. Thousands of years of rain and hard weather had washed away the loose, soft loam, reducing the level of the country sometimes as much as several hundred feet. These hills had remained untouched by reason of a heavy layer of "caprock" which extended clear across the top of them, and was of such thickness as to be impervious to erosion.

East Peak, like all its kind, was rather steep, rising as it did abruptly from the surrounding mesquite flats and was extremely rocky, its sides lined with large uneven boulders which had become, from time to time, dislodged from the caprock. Here and there cliffs of some twenty feet in height showed the effect of weathering and the live oaks and pin oaks grew in thick clumps to its summit.

The road to Beard, county seat of Caloran County, swung north about even with the hill and passed within a mile of its east shoulder. The hill itself was surrounded by pastures and fields and no road passable to vehicles came within a mile of it.

The two friends had just made the turn to the north when Costigan's friend, glancing back, saw another car about to pass them, and hailed it, recognizing its occupants.

"These fellows are going to Beard, Mike; I'll ride on in with them and you won't have to make that drive. Thanks

just the same."

The change having been made, the other car went on and Mike looked about for a place wide enough in which to turn around - the road to Beard being notoriously narrow. He drove slowly along and finally made the turn at the point where the road most nearly approached the hill. As he did so, he heard himself hailed. He shut off the engine and looked about him. A man was approaching him from among the mesquite and Mike recognized him as one of the reticent geologists, from the description he had had.

He was tall, leanly built, very dark and heavily mustached.

Mike grinned.

"Relentless Rudolph, or I'm a Dutchman," he soliloquised as he sat watching the man's approach. "If I were writing a real old melodrama of the Gay Nineties type I wouldn't have to look any further for the villain. Tall, lean, dark, black mustache - ah ha, me proud beauty, ah hev yeh in me powerrrr at larst! Really, he's probably a Sunday School teacher in his home town and a sincere worker in boy scout activities. He looks entirely too much like a desperado to be one."

The man clambered through the wire fence and came up to the car.

"You like to make some money, eh?" he said abruptly, and Mike was somehow startled at the sibilant foreign accent; it suited the man's appearance so perfectly that the result was one of unreality - of premeditated stage effect.

The fellow repeated his question impatiently while Mike was regaining his mental equilibrium which had for some reason been upset. He noted mechanically that the man had

the regular garb effected by most geologists: army hat, laced-up khaki trousers and khaki shirt, and bootees; yet somehow these clothes did not seem to suit the man. Mike could not have placed his finger on the difference, but there was a hint in the way the man wore them, that he was not accustomed to such garments.

He glanced from the clothes to the man's face, and started again. All his theories regarding Sunday School teachers oozed away. Startlingly vivid against the swarthy features, a pair of scintillant eyes stared unwinkingly at him. It was the quality of these eyes which sent an involuntary shiver down Mike's spine. They were inhumanly cold and inhumanly expressionless - more like a snake's eyes than those of a man.

"Yes, sure, I'd like to make some money," he found himself saying mechanically.

"Bueno. You drive to these Lost Plains then, and buy these groceries - I geeve you the leest. Then you come back here and I meet you and take the food and pay you ten dollars."

"All right." Mike was rather roughly clad, following his usual procedure when out "gathering material" and nothing about him or his rattly car would have suggested one of the foremost of the country's young writers. Anyone would have thought him to be what he appeared to be: a young roughneck working in the oil fields.

"How about givin' me the money to get the grub with?" Mike asked, bearing out his assumed character.

"Carramba! I geeve you money? No, no, my friend. You pay for the stuff yourself and bring me the bill. I pay you the price and ten dollars for yourself."

"All right," Mike gave in, shoving in the clutch, reflecting that for realism he should not have given in so easily. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"See that you do," the other sneered in a domineering tone that brought a flush of anger to Mike's face and a hot response to his lips - which, however, was lost in the roar of the motor.

"Maybe," he mused as he drove back to town, "through lack of opportunity or initiative, that man is a solid, substantial citizen somewhere, but if I'm any judge of character at all, that fellow is a potential murderer - a criminal at heart. The accent sounded fake at first, but it's the real thing. That fellow's no Mexican, though - by golly, I guess that's how Skinny found his coin - a family heirloom, maybe. I'll buy it from Skinny and give it back to the fellow. He's a churlish brute, but an interesting character - I wonder what he's doing on the hill. Snake eyes, or I never saw a rattler."

His vivid imagination began weaving a fanciful plot about the sinister appearing Latin - had he only known, events were even then shaping themselves into a tale stranger and grimmer than any story Mike Costigan had ever written.

II

A Girl and a Mystery

Arriving in Lost Plains, Mike went to a grocery store and bought the provisions listed, paying for them from his own pocket. As he stepped out of the door onto the street, he sighted Skinny and beckoned to him.

"Skinny, have you still got that coin?" A sullen nod.

"I'll give you ten dollars for it - twice what it's worth."

"Steve Leary bought it," the kid answered.

"Leary bought it? More like Leary to take it away from you - how much did he give you?"

"Five dollars - what the bank cashier said it was worth," Skinny muttered. "Nuthin' cheap about Leary, if he is a gambler and a bootlegger, I reckon."

"How long ago did you find it?" Mike asked idly.

"Couple uh weeks ago."

"That long?"

"Yeah."

Mike whistled. The Spaniards had been on the peak only a few days, according to what he had heard. He dismissed, with a shrug of his shoulders, the idea that there was any connection between the finding of the coin and the presence of the men. He would have never given the matter a second thought except for the extreme rarity of the coin, coupled with the coincidence of a Spaniard on the hill where the Spanish coin had been found. Mere coincidence, he decided. Spanish coins, even the unusual ones, were nothing so far out of the ordinary, and Spanish surveyors, while rare, were not impossible. Another man would have never thought of the matter at all, and Mike decided that his writer's mind was sharpened to too high a pitch, seeking connections where there were none, and reason where all was mere chance. Life was full of tag ends that never start and seldom finish.

He took his leave of Skinny and then, feeling thirsty, went into a drugstore and purchased a limeade at the cold drink fountain.

While there, the west-bound bus, running from Fort

Worth to El Paso and Santa Fe, passed through and a single passenger alighted, a young woman, slim and clad in a rather flapperish manner.

She entered the drugstore and Steve got a momentary impression of a white face, surprizingly youthful, full red lips and large expressive dark eyes, set off by extremely black, silky and curly hair. His eyes met hers for an instant, and his heart skipped a beat or so as feeling extremely foreign to his nature surged over him.

He had never been a lady's man; far from it. His life had been spent mostly in the hard, rough and extremely masculine atmosphere of the oil fields and boom towns, and his ways, like his stories, had been lain in the ways of men. Yet there was a piquant something about the slim, lonely girl which drew him to her as a magnet draws steel. He felt a vague, confused yet pleasant warmth in the region of his breast and was conscious of a deep desire to see more of this girl who had aroused him so suddenly.

"This is Lost Plains, is it not?" she was saying to the manager of the store at that moment. "Is there a hill in this vicinity known as Caballo Diablo?"

"Not that I know of," the manager replied.

"She means East Peak," Mike spoke up. "The Spaniards gave it the old Indian name - Devil Horse Hill."

"First time I ever knew it," said the manager, "and I been livin' here all my life."

"No one calls it that now," answered Mike. "It's been known as East Cadoak ever since the Americans settled this country. It's down on the oldest maps as Caballo Diablo, though, and I expect you saw it as you came into town."

"The one to the northwest?" she exclaimed. "Yes, I did,

and hoped it was the one I was looking for."

She had turned her large, troubled eyes toward Mike, and he noted the deep shadows under them. A pathetic air of weariness seemed evident in the droop of her slender form. To Mike, a keen observer of people, it seemed that she had been laboring under some terrific strain, both mental and physical. He pitied her without knowing why. The protective instinct stirred in him - she seemed so small and helpless. He was conscious of a ridiculous desire to take her up in his arms and comfort her as one does a frightened child.

"I must get to the hill immediately," she said, suddenly. "How can I go?"

Mike inwardly exulted - more coincidence and a chance to be of aid to this strange girl - then his spirits dropped as a sudden thought struck him: doubtless this girl, who looked Spanish herself, was the fiance or wife of the Spanish geologist on the hill. At any rate he said eagerly:

"I'm going there myself. I'll be glad to take you out - and bring you back, too, if you wish."

Her face lighted. "Oh, that is fine! I'll pay you anything you ask."

Mike felt a foolish resentment of that last, but before he could speak, she turned to the manager, asking if she might leave her suitcase in the drugstore until she returned. At any rate, soliloquised Mike as she accompanied him to the street, she was coming back with him.

The girl was now fairly trembling as if in some great excitement. She spoke scarcely a word during the whole trip, somewhat to Mike's disappointment. He drove carefully and rather slowly, feasting his eyes on her youthful

beauty with casual sidelong glances, striving to analyze the reason for her apparent perturbation. Anticipation of the meeting with a loved one would hardly cause so much nervousness, he decided, and finally gave it up, content to sit beside the girl and rest his eyes upon her, if only temporarily. This girl, thought Mike, was such as he had sometimes dreamed of but never thought to meet. He had introduced himself to her, but she had not replied in kind.

She kept her eyes fixed on the hill in front of them and as they neared their goal, her excitement mounted.

"This is as far as we can go in the car," said Mike, halting at the place where he was to deliver the provisions. "We can go the rest of the way afoot, though it's mighty rough."

She was out of the car in an instant. She started toward the fence, then halted - her eyes widened, her face went white and she turned her eyes slowly on Mike in a stare so full of hatred and accusation that he was struck speechless.

"You beast! You traitor!" she whispered.

Mike's mouth gaped in amazement; he looked about, seeking some clue to her behavior. The man he had mentally designated as Rudolph was standing there, arms folded, an evil smile on his face.

"Ah, senor," said he with a sibilant inflection that somehow seemed fraught with sinister meaning, "you brought back more theese triptan I bargained for! Theese is indeed a pleasure, senorita."

The girl backed slowly away from him, hand outstretched as if to fend him off.

"Gomez! Don't you touch me!" she whispered, and Mike knew that she was terribly afraid. As for himself, he was

too dazed at the turn events had taken to be capable of intelligent speech or action for the moment.

Gomez, still smiling evilly, stepped forward with a sinuous, noiseless tread that reminded Mike of a great serpent slithering toward his victim. His long thin fingers closed cruelly about the girl's arm, and she whimpered pitifully, fairly wilting in his grasp.

At that, Mike awoke suddenly. Striding forward, he caught the Spaniard's wrist in a steel-like grip and flung aside the offending hand, none too gently.

"I don't know what this is all about," he said angrily, "but you keep your hands off the lady."

"So-o-o-o!" the drawn out word was like the hiss of a snake. "Maybe theese is some of your business, eh?"

"This lady is my passenger," Mike retorted, "and I'm responsible for her. There's your stuff. Take it and go."

For a moment they stood toe to toe, the dark countenance of Gomez sinister with unvoiced threats, Mike's eyes blazing with a slow fury that was beginning to consume him. Then suddenly the Latin's right hand flashed to his waistband and at the same time Mike's right fist jolted against his jaw - a straight arm smash that hurled Gomez flat on his back as if he had been struck down by a trip-hammer. Mike kicked from his hand the knife he had drawn, and stepped back, watching him warily, fists clinched and ready for more action. The Latin, however, showed no inclination to renew the combat. He rose dizzily, wiped a trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth and strode away, muttering, after sending a single murderous glance at his conqueror.

Mike turned back to the girl, rather uncertain as to the

kind of treatment he could expect from her.

"Shall I take you back to town, miss?" he asked.

"Yes, please," her voice was low, shaken, her manner listless. The meeting with Gomez seemed to have taken something out of her. Her former excitement seemed to have faded away into a sort of bewildered despair. Silently she got back into the car, sinking down onto the cushion in a sort of still despair, nor did she speak for some time.

Mike did not intrude upon her thoughts, but kept his eyes straight on the road in front of them, his mind whirling with fragmentary thoughts. He had a feeling that he had stumbled onto a real, live story and a mystery.

At last he felt a timid touch on his arm and looked about to see the large dark eyes swimming with tears.

"I misjudged you," she faltered. "Forgive me for the harsh things I said. I thought - " she did not complete the sentence.

"That's all right, miss," Mike stumbled. "I - I - " suddenly he realized that he, who had never before felt at a loss for words, was making an awkward fool out of himself. He made a desperate effort and recovered some of his customary ease of manner.

"I don't wish to appear to be intruding in your affairs," said he. "I don't even know your name or why that fellow attacked you. But I know you're in trouble and I wish I could help you. Won't you let me?"

Nor did his request seem at all unusual or impertinent to Mike, grappling as he was with the new emotion which had come so suddenly into his life.

The girl intertwined her fingers nervously. It was evident that she had almost reached the point where a woman

is likely to turn for help to anyone who seems kindly disposed toward her, stranger or not. Her lips parted, as if to speak, then a sudden shudder shook her.

"No! No!" she murmured. "Thank you - but I can't - I can't!"

Mike naturally did not push the matter, feeling that he had already overstepped the bounds of common courtesy.

Scarcely a word passed between them until they drew up before the drugstore in Lost Plains and the girl asked what his charges were. Mike answered that he made no charges, and seeing that she was inclined to argue the matter, threw in the clutch and drove off with an abruptness which almost amounted to rudeness. He felt that he was in no position to explain why he did not choose to charge this girl - a position which might seem incongruous considering the role he had assumed.

He drove to the boarding house in which he roomed and spent the rest of the evening in meditation, stopping only to descend to supper, after which he again mounted the creaky stairs, entered his room and, sitting down on the bed, continued to ponder over the affairs of the day.

He gathered the events together: first, the finding of the Spanish coin by Skinny, the appearance of the pseudo-geologist, the arrival of the girl and the culmination of this arrival in the assault made upon her by Gomez.

Just what connection these things had with one another, he could not say. At last he gave up with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, deciding that his story-weaving mind was striving to splice a thread of narrative between the chance coin and the Latin-appearing people on the hill. At any rate, he mused, the man who now had the coin was the last person

in the world whom he thought would be interested in antique coins - a gambler and a bootlegger. He doubted if Skinny could tell just where he found the coin now, since his vague memory was dimmed by the passage of the day.

He got in bed, turned out the light and was soon asleep.

III

A Battle in the Shadows

Mike woke suddenly. He sat up in bed, listening intently, eyes unconsciously straining to pierce the darkness of his room. What had awakened him, he wondered? Had he dreamed that somewhere in the building a woman had screamed - a short, terrified shriek which had broken off as suddenly as it had begun? He was about to lie down again when the sound of a struggle of some sort reached him - the soft shuffle of feet - a whispered oath. The sounds seemed to come from a room directly across the hall. Mike rose. Here was something which would bear looking into. That room was unoccupied to the best of his knowledge.

He crossed the hall, halting a moment at the closed door to verify his suspicions. Yes, there was no doubt of it - some sort of a conflict was taking place in that dark room. The thought of plunging in against unknown marauders was rather breathtaking - the hour, which was past midnight, and the setting lending a rather eery effect to the thing. The sensible thing to do, of course, would be to awaken the other boarders and the landlady and summons aid before investigating - but Mike Costigan had never prided himself on sensible actions.

So now he tried the door and finding it locked, hurled his

full weight against it. The frail lock gave way and he catapulted into the room.

Moonlight streamed in at the one window, making a vague pattern of shadows on the floor. Mike got an instant's confused impression of a weaving, writhing clump of darkness near the window, then the clump separated into two figures, one of which rushed him silently, a shadowy and illusive form, yet fraught with evident menace.

Mike saw a gleam of steel and instinctively flung up his left arm and by sheer luck caught the descending wrist on his forearm, feeling the knife slide harmlessly through his sleeve. At the same instant he struck out blindly with his right, a glancing blow that spun his ghost-like attacker half-way around. He followed instantly with the left as the knife went up again and this time landed solidly. The marauder shot back across the room, landing with a crash on the floor near the window.

Moonlight flooded his face for an instant and Mike caught a glimpse of heavy features, sparsely bearded, of thick lips that writhed in a snarl of murderous hate. Then, as he caught up a chair to renew the attack, the fellow sprang up and vanished through the window, hurling his short, heavy body across the sill with ape-like agility.

Mike rushed to the window and leaned out in time to see the man spring from the ladder which leaned against the house, and scud away into the shadows. Mike recognized the ladder as one left on the premises by some carpenters who had done some work earlier in the day.

He turned the light on - then halted in utter amazement. There on the floor lay the girl he had driven to East Peak that day. She crouched there, one arm supporting her, the

other hand pressed against her breast, and for an instant Mike thought her to be dying. Scarcely knowing what he did, he dropped to his knees beside her and drew her slim form into his arms; and in that instant Mike Costigan knew that love had come into his life.

"Girl, are you hurt?" he gasped hoarsely, shuddering as he saw that her flimsy nightgown hung in shreds about her, as if slashed by a keen knife.

"No," she whispered, her breath coming in swift pants, and a sigh of infinite relief escaped his lips. Since she was not hurt, it seemed to him that she was simply exhausted from her battle with her unknown assailant - on the point of physical and mental collapse.

He lifted her tenderly and laid her on the bed. He was trembling, shaken. Too upset to act upon logical reasoning. All his life, impulse had moved him as it did now. He knelt beside the bed, placed his arm under her shoulders and drew her to him.

"I don't even know your name and you know nothing about me," he whispered. "And I don't care. I know this: I love you and I'm going to help you and protect you, whether you like it or not."

He gazed deeply into dark, brooding eyes as he spoke, overcome with fright at what he had said. But those eyes grew very soft and almost pathetically appealing, and a timid hand stole across his shoulders.

Then came the sound of footsteps clomping up the hall and an excited babble of voices as the landlady and her boarders came to investigate the strange sounds.

The girl hastily tucked the bedclothes around her shoulders and said in a hurried undertone:

"Don't act surprized no matter what I say!"

Mike stepped back from the bed and an instant later, curious faces peeked cautiously in at the door.

"Land sakes!" said the landlady. "What kind uh doin's is these, this time uh night?"

The girl blushed prettily.

"It's really too bad I woke everyone," she said innocently. "A large cat got in at my window where the screen was torn and frightened me terribly! Mr. Costigan heard me scream and came in and chased it out."

The landlady frowned. "I didn't know that screen was tore loose," she muttered. The girl returned her stare guilelessly.

Her glance roved toward the window where the hanging screen was indisputable evidence, and Mike thought that if she went over to investigate, she would see the ladder against the side of the house and get more ideas on the subject. However, she did not and whatever suspicions she might have had regarding Mike's presence in the room, she did not voice them. Certainly the furniture showed evidence of a struggle of some kind - which might conceivably have been caused by a man's efforts to eject an unwilling and extremely active cat.

The landlady shrugged her shoulders and herded her flock out again, mumbling as she did, "A cat, huh? Guess it clumb the corner uh the house! No tellin' what notions these city gals 'ull git."

Costigan was the last to go, naturally, and he paused for a swift whisper.

"Will you be safe now?"

"Yes," she answered in a tone equally guarded. "I'll

leave the light on - and he won't dare come back tonight."

Mike stepped quickly across to the window, caught the tops of the ladder and thrust it away from the house, flinching at the noise it made in falling.

"I'll be just across the hall in case you need me."

"Thank you," a warm smile lighted her weary features. "Go now, please; I'll tell you everything in the morning, I promise you."

TO BE CONCLUDED

Roads

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

I too have strode those white-paved roads that run
Through dreamy woodlands to the Roman Wall,
Have seen the white towns gleaming in the sun,
And heard afar the elf-like trumpet call.

Nameless Cults : A HISTORY

BY CHARLES O. GRAY

The original edition of NAMELESS CULTS (Unaussprechlichen Kulturen) was published in Dusseldorf in 1839. This so-called "Black Book" (not because of its color, but because of its dark contents) was the work of one Fvindhuf Von Junzt (1795-1840), a mad German poet and philosopher. Von Junzt spent his entire life delving into forbidden subjects; he travelled in all parts of the world, gained entrance into innumerable secret societies, and read countless little-known and esoteric books and manuscripts in the original (he was one of the few men who could read the abhorred NECRONOMICON of Abdul Alhazred in the original Greek translation). Six months after he returned from a mysterious journey to Mongolia, Von Junzt was found dead under mysterious circumstances, while working on a second volume of dark lore. The chapters of the Black Book, which range from startling clarity of exposition to murky ambiguity, contain many statements and hints of knowledge suppressed for ages. Reading what Von Junzt dared put in print arouses uneasy speculations as to what it was that he dared not tell. What dark matters were contained in the unpublished manuscript on which he worked unceasingly for months before his death will never be known. The pages, which lay torn and scattered upon the floor of the locked chamber in which Von Junzt

was found dead, were pieced together by his closest friend, the Frenchman Alexis Ladeau. After reading what was written, Ladeau burnt the manuscript to ashes and cut his own throat with a razor.

The major portion of the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* concerns cults and objects of dark worship which Von Junzt maintained existed in his day. The incredible subject matter and extreme ambiguity of the book have caused it long to be regarded as the ravings of a maniac, while Von Junzt was damned with the brand of insanity. The fact remains that many of the assertions made by Von Junzt are unanswerable. Less than a dozen copies of the Dusseldorf edition exist today, for the quantity issued was not great, and when it became known to the public that Von Junzt was found dead with the marks of taloned fingers on his throat, many possessors of the book burned their volumes in panic.

Five years later (1845) a London printer, one Bridewall, pirated the work and issued a cheap translation for sensational effect, full of grotesque wood-cuts, and riddled with misspellings, faulty translations and the usual errors of a cheap and unscholarly printing. This still further discredited the original work, and publishers and public forgot about the book until 1909, when the Golden Goblin Press of New York brought out an edition. This production was so carefully expurgated that fully a fourth of the original matter was cut out; the book was handsomely bound and decorated with the exquisite and weirdly imaginative illustrations of Diego Vasquez. The edition was intended for popular consumption but the artistic instinct of the publishers defeated that end, since the cost of issuing the book was so great that they were forced to cite it at a prohibitive price. This edit-

ion is now exceedingly rare, though not so much so as the 1839 Dusseldorf edition. There are approximately thirty known volumes in existence. Rumors state that the mad poet Justin Geoffrey (1905-1926) possessed one of the first editions, but that it disappeared with other volumes of dark lore after Geoffrey died screaming in a madhouse, following a visit to a sinister, ill-regarded village in Hungary.

Von Junzt relates many stories of the survivals of cults worshipping pre-human entities or prehistoric gods, such as Ghatanothoa, Bran, and others. The principal obscurity of the book is in Von Junzt's use of the term "keys" - a phrase used many times by him, in various relations, such as descriptions of the infamous Black Stone in Hungary and the legendary Temple of the Toad in Honduras.

CHRONOLOGY

1. Unaussprechlichen Kulten, by Fvindvuf Von Junzt, published in Dusseldorf, 1839.
2. Pirated English translation as NAMELESS CULTS, published in London by Bridewall, 1845.
3. Carefully expurgated edition published by Golden Goblin Press, New York, 1909.

The Bar by the Side of the Road

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

There are liquorless souls that follow paths
Where whiskey never ran -
Let me live in a bar by the side of the road
And drink from the old beer can.

Let me live in a bar by the side of the road,
When the race of man goes dry,
The men who are "drys" and the men who are "wets"
(But none are so "wet" as I.)

I see from my bar by the side of the road,
A land with a drouth accurst;
And men who press on with the ardour of beer,
And men who are faint with thirst.

I know there are bars in Old Mexico,
And schooners of glorious height.
That the booze splashes on through the long
afternoon,
And floods through the gutters of night.

But still I take gin when the travellers take gin
And Scotch with the whiskey man,
Nor ever refuse a thirsty soul
A swig from my old beer can.

For why should I praise Prohibition's restraints,
Or love the revenue man?
Let me live in a bar by the side of the road,
And drink from the old beer can!



Death-Song of Conan the Cimmerian

In Memoriam: Robert E. Howard (1906-1936)

BY LIN CARTER

1.

The road was long and the road was hard
And the sky was cold and grey:
The dead white moon was a frozen shard
In the dim pale dawn of day:
But thief and harlot, king and guard -
Warrior, wizard, knave and bard -
Rode with me all the way.

2.

The wind was sharp as a whetted knife
As it blew from the wet salt seas:
The storm wind stirred to a ghostly life
The gaunt black skeletal trees:
But I drank the foaming wine of life -
Wine of plunder and lust and strife -
Down to the bitter lees.

3.

A boy, from the savage north I came
To cities of silk and sin:
With torch and steel, in blood and flame,
I won what a man may win:
Aye, gambled and won at the Devil's game -
Splendor and glory and glittering fame -
And mocked at Death's skull-grin.

4.

And there were foemen to fight and slay
And friends to love and trust:
And crowns to conquer and toss away
And lips to taste with lust:
And songs to keep black night at bay -
And wine to swill to the break of day -
What matter the end be dust?

5.

I've won my share of your gems and gold,
They crumble into clods:
I've gorged on the best that life can hold,
And Devil take the odds:
The grave is deep and the night is cold -
The world's a skull-full of stinking mould -
And I laugh at your little gods!

6.

The lean road slunk through a blasted land
Where the earth was parched and black:
But we were a merry, jesting band
Who asked no easier track:
Rogue and reaver and firebrand -
And Life rode laughing at my right hand -
And Death rode at my back.

7.

The road was dusty and harsh and long -
Crom, but a man gets dry! -
I'm old and weary and Death is strong
But flesh was born to die:
Hai, Gods! But it was a merry throng -
Rode by my side with jest and song -
Under an empty sky.

8.

I've heard fat, cunning priestlings tell
How damned souls writhe and moan:
That paradise they can buy and sell
For gold and gold alone:
To the flames with scripture and priest as
well -
I'll stride down the scarlet throat of Hell -
And dice for the Devil's throne!

I faced Life boldly and unafraid -
 Should I flinch as Death draws near?
 Life's but a game Death and I have played
 Many a wearisome year:
Hai! to the gallant friends I made -
 Slave and swordsman and lissome maid! -
 I begrudge no foot of the road I strayed -
 The road which endeth ... here.

Harvest

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

We reap and bind the bitter yield
 Of seed we never sowed,
 To buy the meat that others eat,
 To pay the debts by others sealed -
 Theirs was the fatness of the field,
 Ours the barren road.

Review

RED SHADOWS, by Robert E. Howard, Donald M. Grant, West Kingston, R.I., 1968. Second edition, 1971. \$6.

Of his first successful heroic fantasy series character, Robert E. Howard once wrote: "Solomon Kane I created when I was in high school, at the age of about sixteen, but ... several years passed before I put him on paper. He was probably the result of an admiration for a certain type of cold, steely-nerved duellist that existed in the sixteenth century."

Seven Kane stories saw print in *Weird Tales* during Howard's lifetime. Other works in the series - including two completed stories, three poems, and four fragments - came to light over a long period of time after the author's death. With RED SHADOWS, Glenn Lord and Donald M. Grant have assembled the entire Kane canon, Kane-on-for-sooth, in handsome, solid book form, with four striking illustrations by Jeff Jones. (With one minor exception - the brief fragment "Death's Black Riders," which appeared in THE HOWARD COLLECTOR #10, Spring 1968.)

Solomon Kane is a Puritan adventurer of the time of Queen Elizabeth I, a lean, dour wanderer of "relentless duelling and wrong-redressing practices," as H.P. Love-

craft described him. One can certainly suggest prototypes - the swordsman heroes of Dumas and Sabatini, Johnston McCulley's Zorro, Jack London's Guillaume de Sainte-Maure of THE STAR ROVER, and George Challis' splendid rascal Louis Madelin, as well as historical personages like Drake, Raleigh, and Cellini - but Kane is a strong, formidable creation in his own right.

As Miller, Clark, and de Camp did with Conan, Glenn Lord has arranged the Kane stories chronologically and provided ingenious biographical information to tighten continuity. RED SHADOWS follows Solomon Kane's life from youth to old age, portraying him always as the restless knight errant, fated never to find real peace or satisfaction.

"Skulls in the Stars" and "The Right Hand of Doom", which open the collection, deal with Kane's early supernatural exploits in a singularly unquiet English countryside setting. "Red Shadows" - the first published Kane story - moves swiftly from continental Europe to Africa as the black-clad swordsman follows the bloody trail of the pirate Le Loup. It contains one of Howard's most powerful scenes, all the more effective for its careful understatement, as Kane comes upon a young victim of the pirate and watches her die in his arms:

"Slowly he rose, mechanically wiping his hands upon his cloak. A dark scowl had settled on his somber brow. Yet he made no wild, reckless vow, swore no oath by saints or devils.

"Men shall die for this," he said coldly."

In "Rattle of Bones," the backdrop is a decaying tavern in Germany's Black Forest where Kane becomes involved in an act of ghostly vengeance. "The Castle of the Devil," one

of the fragments, is set in the same locale and introduces John Silent, a hearty bravo reminiscent of Captain John Smith and Conan the Cimmerian. His conversation and growing comradeship with the grim Kane strike a refreshing light note and make one regret that the story was uncompleted.

"The Moon of Skulls" returns to Africa; Solomon, searching for a kidnapped girl, finds a lost colony of Atlantis ruled over by a beautiful, evil queen in the pattern of Haggard's Ayesha and Burroughs' La of Opar. The novella is essentially fast action pulp, but Howard's portrait of a decadent, dying civilization is convincing, and there is a Conan-like fight between Kane and a giant snake. Also, one of the Atlanteans mentions Valka, Hotah, Honen, and Golgor, suggesting a connection with the Kull cycle.

"Blades of the Brotherhood" is similar to "Red Shadows" in that Kane is again stalking a pirate crew to avenge the murder of a young girl. A marginal rather than a central character this time - the actual protagonist is the young soldier Jack Hollinster, whose sweetheart has been abducted by the ruthless Sir George Banway - Solomon still dominates by his selfless code of honor and merciless fury. His climactic speech is revealing: "While evil flourishes and wrongs grow rank, while men are persecuted and women wronged, while weak things, human or animal, are maltreated, there is no rest for me beneath the skies, nor peace at any board or bed."

John Pocsik's rewrite of this story appears in the Arkham House anthology *OVER THE EDGE* and is an interesting piece in its own right, well worth looking up.

"The Hills of the Dead" and "Wings in the Night" pit Kane

against vampires and winged monsters in Africa, the former notable for the crafty, good humoredly-sardonic witch doctor N'Longa and the latter for its reiteration of Howard's pessimistic philosophy: "...Man, staggering among the tooth-marked bones and severed grinning heads of humans ... screaming incoherent hate at the grisly, winged shapes of Night that make him their prey ..." In both, Solomon fights hand-to-hand with the powers of darkness in typically gory Howardian battles and by his victories offers some assurance and comfort for the beleaguered individual - a triumph of self-reliance over despair.

"The Footfalls Within" is more perfunctory: Kane is taken captive by Arab slavers and escapes to do supernatural combat with an amorphous demon set free from a crypt in the jungle. The fragments "Hawk of Basti" and "The Children of Asshur" again present lost races, the latter especially Haggardian with its city of time-forgotten Sumerians.

The three poems included in the volume also present a wide range of settings and moods. "The One Black Stain" is interesting for its depiction of Sir Francis Drake and Howard's view on the responsibilities of a leader of men, while "The Return of Sir Richard Grenville" displays the writer's fondness for the ballad form. In "Solomon Kane's Homecoming," which closes the volume, the adventurer, now elderly, returns to his native Devon to settle down at last, but goes a-roving when he hears the wind come keening off the sea. A fit conclusion for the saga of a warrior who, like Arthur, can never die, but has just gone elsewhere, ready to return when his services are needed.

The contents of RED SHADOWS (now out of print), save

**All fled — all done, so lift me on the pyre;
The Feast is over and the lamps expire.**



Glenn Lord's introduction and chronological notes, are also available in three paperback volumes from Centaur Press: THE MOON OF SKULLS, THE HAND OF KANE, and SOLO-MON KANE.

--Fred Blosser

On With the Play

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Up with the curtain, lo, the stage is set;
The mimes come trooping for their destin'd parts,
The Devil swings his hand, the music starts;
But the main star has not arrived as yet,
And all the players wait and swear and fret.
He comes! The tamborine with empty clack
Greets the proud brow, the eye, the unbent back;
On with the play of broken dreams and sweat!

Aye, play their game if you would wish to rise,
Conform yourself to standard rote and rule,
But when you've reached the pinnacle of pelf
Some day take down an old book from the shelf,
And scanning pages, years, with curious eyes,
Remember one who signed himself - A Fool.

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